

## CONSCIENCE OF MAN

## THE BACHELOR GIRL ILLUSTRATES IT.

By HELEN ROWLAND.

"Two made a discovery," remarked the Mere Man solemnly, as he deposited his hat on the Bachelor Girl's tabourette and his feet on the fender. "Two got a conscience."

"How do you know?" demanded the Bachelor Girl, pulling up the tea table and carefully laying a paper napkin over the most conspicuous hole in the cloth.

The Mere Man glanced at her reproachfully.

"How do you know when you've got a new tooth?" he retorted. "It hurts."

"Oh," said the Bachelor Girl, sympathetically, "then it's all over."

"What's over?" The Mere Man stopped in the act of filling his pipe and looked up suspiciously.

"The fun," explained the Bachelor Girl, calmly setting the cream jug down on the paper napkin and, turning to fill the kettle, "a man's conscience never begins to hurt until the last thing."

"What?"

"Until the game is finished," continued the Bachelor Girl, "while the excitement lasts his conscience sleeps like a babe on a summer afternoon. It only wakes up in the cold, gray dawn of the morning after, when the consequences come around and frighten it into action. It isn't while the wine flows that his scruples bother him—it's when the headache begins and the bill comes in. It isn't while he's winning the other man's money at poker—it's when he begins to lose his own. It isn't the dinner that worries him—it's the indigestion that follows. The masculine conscience is made of good, durable India rubber, warranted to stretch without hurting, as long as the fun lasts," and the Bachelor Girl set down her teacups with an emphatic little clatter.

The Mere Man stretched out his feet and sighed as he lit his pipe.

"I ask for bread," he murmured sadly, "and get a stone. I cry for comfort, and receive a cut. I cry for soothing sirup, and get a sword thrust. I want to be virtuous, and am told that I am vile. Give me a cup of tea," and he held out his hand imperatively.

"Tell me about it," said the Bachelor Girl, with a reluctant smile, as she took the remaining armchair and dropped a lump of sugar in her cup.

"It," began the Mere Man, solemnly, "is a woman."

"Of course," acquiesced the Bachelor Girl, nonchalantly. "Are you tired of her?"

"I beg your pardon."

"Or have you got yourself in a scrape or a breach of promise suit?"

"Neither," returned the Mere Man, promptly. "I like her immensely."

"Which means that you have ceased to love her at all," commented the Bachelor Girl.

"And I've managed with the most infinite care to keep her—keep her—"

"Guessing," suggested the Bachelor Girl, with an appreciative gurgle.

"To keep her respect," corrected the Mere Man, "and my own head."

"Which means," interrupted the Bachelor Girl, "that you telephoned and telegraphed, instead of putting your tender messages into letters; that you sent her post cards instead of notes, and gave her books and flowers and compliments instead of jewelry and promises. Who," she finished, stirring her tea, "is the other woman?"

The Mere Man jumped—and spilled his tea.

"Why," he exclaimed petulantly, "do you ask that question?"

"Because," returned the Bachelor Girl, smiling triumphantly, "it's the only one left to ask. A man's conscience toward a woman will stretch and stretch interminably—until it is either strangled by the direction of matrimony or a yank from another woman. If you aren't bored or threatened by the first woman, you must be charmed by the second." And the Bachelor Girl laughed at a rippling little laugh across her teacup.

The Mere Man shifted in his chair and gulped his tea nervously.

"But," he protested, "I knew long before I met the other girl that it was wrong to monopolize the first one, especially as I wasn't—"

"Didn't intend to marry her," finished the Bachelor Girl, cheerfully nodding her curly head. "But that didn't bother you. A man never feels any conscientious qualms about playing with a woman until the game gets stale, or tiresome, or too serious, or he sees another game more interesting. Then he suddenly grows noble and virtuous and gently tells the girl that they must part for her sake; that he isn't worthy of her, and wouldn't stand in her way, and all that sort of thing. He never thinks it necessary, at the beginning of a flirtation, to let the woman know that he is only amusing himself; it is not until the last act has been played and the last tining has been run and the game is up that he becomes suddenly frank, and kindly but firmly opens her eyes to her mistake. It is only when the affair has gone as far as he intended it should go that he tells her that it would be honorable to put an end to it. I once knew a chap who tried for six months to kiss a sweet, modest girl. The moment he had done it his conscience rose up and in the afternoon lecturing her on the folly of promiscuous kissing."

"Which was highly noble and commendable of him," declared the Mere Man, admiringly.

"But he got the kiss first," remarked the Bachelor Girl, sarcastically. "A man always takes care to do what he likes first and then to be sorry—afterward. He will pursue a pleasure or a woman or an object to the ends of the earth, and never feel a change of remorse or contrition, until he has attained the one or the other—and found it wasn't all he had expected. He may know perfectly well that it is wrong for him to flirt with his stenographer, but he thought never interrupts his pleasure until Fate, in the person of his wife, pounces down upon him—or he sees a prettier stenographer. He may go on for years dallying around some woman and so monopolizing her that he prevents her from marrying anybody else; but it never occurs to him to stop until he suddenly begins to notice the crows' feet round her eyes and the increasing lameness of her figure. He may discover the day after his wedding that he isn't going to be happy with the woman he has married; but it never suggests itself to him that they would be happier apart—until he discovers another woman with whom he would be happier. He will coax and coax a girl to do something that she shouldn't—to kiss him or take a cocktail or smoke a cigarette—and the next day feel so ashamed of himself that he never wants to see her again. But it isn't until the next day?" And the Bachelor Girl set down her cup with a vehemence that made the teapot tremble.

"Well," retorted the Mere Man, cheerfully, "it's better to reform the next

day than not at all. It's better to reform in time to save—or to save—"

"To save yourself!" suggested the Bachelor Girl, helpfully.

"To save the situation," corrected the Mere Man, "than to go on being foolish."

"Just as though a man ever stopped being foolish!" remarked the Bachelor Girl, sententiously.

"What?"

"Just as though 'saving' one situation didn't mean getting into another—situation!" Just as though any amount of experience or remorse would prevent a man from doing the same thing over again—if he found it amusing. He will go straight from a struggle with his conscience and plunge into another unconscious flirtation. He is like the tipper who forgets his headache the moment it has worn off. It's not conscience, but consequences, that bother him. His conscience is so accommodating that he can argue it around to any point of view. It's so convenient that he can tuck it away in his hip pocket and carry it about for weeks without feeling its weight. It's so patient that he can lay all his sins on its poor little back and it will never protest. I once knew a man who went straight through a love affair to the very altar, and then left the girl waiting at the

church door because his 'conscience' had suddenly told him that he didn't love her and ought not to go on deceiving her."

"There was something in that!" exclaimed the Mere Man, leniently. "A chap has got to stop somewhere—"

"Stop!" cried the Bachelor Girl, sitting up and waving her spoon excitedly. "He should stop before he begins—unless he can play fair! He should stop before the kiss or the proposal, or the wedding day. He should stop before the woman falls in love, or—"

"What?" interrupted the Mere Man.

"How can he, when the average woman falls in love before he can begin?"

"When she makes it so easy for him to go on, and keep going on, that he is somewhere on the verge of the wedding before he knows it. If men have no conscience toward women, it's because women are so careful to tell that conscience to sleep and keep it there, until they have finished the game."

"Game!" The Bachelor Girl flashed a scornful glance across the tea table. "Love isn't a game to a woman; it's her mission in life."

"Well, it's a game to a man," retorted the Mere Man, blithely leaning comfortably back and puffing at his pipe, "and that's why he doesn't take it seriously nor bother his conscience about it."

"Then, why," demanded the Bachelor Girl, "are you bothering your conscience about it now?"

"I want to get out of the game," grumbled the Mere Man, "and the girl won't—"

"Which girl, Mr. Porter?"

"The first girl," returned the Mere Man; "the girl I've been playing with won't—"

"Resign in favor of the girl you want to begin playing with?"

The Mere Man tugged at his pipe uncomfortably.

"Oh, you've got me all mixed up," he grumbled.

"I think you've got yourself mixed up," laughed the Bachelor Girl, cheerfully.

"Why," she added, with sudden illumination, "don't you tell the girl all about it?"

"What?" The Mere Man jumped. "Tell which girl?"

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"Not on your life!" returned the Mere Man.

"But he got the kiss first," remarked the Bachelor Girl, sarcastically. "A man always takes care to do what he likes first and then to be sorry—afterward. He will pursue a pleasure or a woman or an object to the ends of the earth, and never feel a change of remorse or contrition, until he has attained the one or the other—and found it wasn't all he had expected. He may know perfectly well that it is wrong for him to flirt with his stenographer, but he thought never interrupts his pleasure until Fate, in the person of his wife, pounces down upon him—or he sees a prettier stenographer. He may go on for years dallying around some woman and so monopolizing her that he prevents her from marrying anybody else; but it never occurs to him to stop until he suddenly begins to notice the crows' feet round her eyes and the increasing lameness of her figure. He may discover the day after his wedding that he isn't going to be happy with the woman he has married; but it never suggests itself to him that they would be happier apart—until he discovers another woman with whom he would be happier. He will coax and coax a girl to do something that she shouldn't—to kiss him or take a cocktail or smoke a cigarette—and the next day feel so ashamed of himself that he never wants to see her again. But it isn't until the next day?" And the Bachelor Girl set down her cup with a vehemence that made the teapot tremble.

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